

Sterling

Community Plan 2004



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I. INTRODUCTION AND PURPOSE

Sterling is a friendly Alaskan community located at the confluence of the Kenai and Moose River. The residents that make up the population are of all walks of life and have a wide spread of job descriptions. Sterling's residents are very independent thinkers and love their rural lifestyle. The people enjoy the river system recreation and small town feeling. They are strong believers of doing things for themselves and with the help of volunteers. Most all of the functions and facilities that comprise the heart of Sterling have been accomplished through volunteerism, hard work, and some grants.

Which brings us to the purpose of a Sterling Community Action Plan. The Sterling community has met numerous times to discuss a plan and "what we would like the future of Sterling to be like." The community's first meeting was held at the Sterling Elementary School in the middle 1990s with over 400 participants. Since then, community meetings have been held at the Sterling Community Club almost monthly and special meetings, at different locations, on the following dates:

- ❖ February 1998: A request was sent to our legislative contingency for the amount of \$100,000 with the community's goals and objectives included. The projects included planning and design of an enlargement of the log cabin for a community building; install bathroom, kitchen and running water; improve the skating rink; landscaping and parking lot; bar-b-q pit and covered picnic area; and play equipment for the kiddy park.
- ❖ September 1999: Notices were posted at community businesses informing them that the Sterling Community Club was embarking on a process of writing a Sterling Community Action Plan regarding what kind of vision the community has for the future of the area.
- ❖ November 15, 1999: The first official community meeting was held at Sterling Senior Center for the purpose of discussing if there was interest in writing a community plan. Meeting notices were advertised in the Peninsula Clarion and on flyers in Sterling. Mark Weatherstone, from the Kenai Peninsula Conservation and Development District, was guest speaker. There were 33 people in attendance. Consensus was "yes" to develop a community plan. A vote on "Likes" and "Dislikes" was taken. Ten people volunteered to be on a steering committee to design a survey and then work on a draft of a Sterling Community Action Plan.
- ❖ January 7, 2000: A meeting was held at the Sterling Senior Center to discuss the Legislative Capital Improvement priorities for Sterling. It was voted on that the priority for the year 2000 was an emergency generator for the Sterling Senior Center as it is a designated emergency center.

- ❖ April 5, 2000: First meeting of the Sterling Community Action Plan Steering Committee was held at Norm and Barb Blakeley's house. Five Steering Committee members were in attendance. The "Likes" and "Dislikes" that were established at the previous November 15th meeting were discussed.
- ❖ April 19, 2000: A Steering Committee meeting was held to discuss a community survey and what questions to put on the survey...
- ❖ May 9, 2000: The Steering Committee met and developed the final questions for the survey. Bob Oakes was given authority to have the survey printed and mailed to all box holders at the Sterling Post Office.
- ❖ February 2001: Bob Oakes, Norm Blakeley, and Grace Merkes met with legislators to discuss funding for long-range projects.
- ❖ April 2, 2001: A community meeting was held at the Sterling Senior Center to discuss the possibility of combining a multi-purpose building with the Senior Center.
- ❖ March 2002: Over 1,100 surveys were sent out.
- ❖ April 2002: 637 participants completed the survey.

Mark Weatherstone, from the Kenai Peninsula Conservation and Development District, advised and helped facilitate and coordinate the planning meetings. Most all of the meetings were advertised in the Peninsula Clarion and on KSRM Radio. This document represents the cumulative product of all those meetings.

II. GENERAL DESCRIPTION OF AREA

History, Culture and Demographics

The Kenai Peninsula has been the home of the Kenaitze Indians for hundreds of years. The area known today as Sterling was originally known as Naptowne. Its present name of "Sterling" was formalized in 1954 because the post office was having trouble getting the mail sent to another area with a similar name of Naptown. An archaeological site, containing prehistoric house pits, has been discovered at the Isaac Walton Campground at the confluence of the Kenai and Moose River. Some historical excavating has been done at the site and many artifacts have been found from past civilizations.

Sterling's homesteaders were the modern day pioneers of the Sterling area. In the late 1940s through the early 1960s pioneers were allowed to locate their homes and develop 20 acres of the 160-acre plots they filed on. The federal government gave them patent to the land after all the requirements were completed. There were about 50 to 60 homesteads developed at that time. The private land that Sterling citizens own today are those homesteads and

government parcels that were pioneered in the early days. The rest of the land around Sterling is either federal, state, borough or Native land. In the early 1950s the homesteaders applied to the BLM (Bureau of Land Management) for some land to build a school on. They received the land and built a log school, which is still there today. There were between 20 and 40 students in the school in the early days.

The population for the Sterling census area for 2000 was 4,705, compared to 3,802 in 1990. Though the federal census boundary lines for Sterling were reduced there was an increase of 1,103 people from 1990 to 2000.

There has never been an official boundary set for “Sterling” as Sterling is an unincorporated area in the Kenai Peninsula Borough. The demographics of the Sterling area have gradually been changing from a median age of 31.7 in 1990 to a median age of 36.4 in 2000. The age of 55 to the age of 85 and over has a big percent of change from 428 (or 11.3%) in 1990 to 757 (or 16.1%) in 2000. This shows that there are a large number of older and retired people living in the Sterling area.

Location and Climate

Sterling is located on the Sterling Highway at the junction of the Moose and Kenai rivers, 18 miles east of the city of Kenai. It lies at approximately 60.53722° North Latitude and 150.76472° West Longitude (Sec. 1, T005N, R009W, Seward Meridian) in the Kenai Recording District. Although there are no official boundaries established for the Sterling area, the 2000 census shows that Sterling encompasses about 77 square miles of land and 2.1 square miles of water. Winter temperatures range from –15 degrees (Fahrenheit) to 22 degrees, and summer temperatures vary from 45 degrees to 75 degrees. Average annual precipitation is 20 inches. Long time residents have noticed that temperatures have been getting warmer over the past 20 years, as they have in other areas of the world.

Public Facilities and Services

Occupied houses use individual water wells and septic tank systems and are fully plumbed. Many homes in this area are used only seasonally. In 2000 there were a total of 2,554 households with 1,676 of them occupied. The school operates its own water well and sewer system. The Kenai Peninsula Borough provides a refuse transfer facility at Mile 85 of the Sterling Highway.

There is an emergency services/fire station just south of the Sterling Elementary School. Central Peninsula Emergency Services provides fire and ambulance service to the Sterling area. The service area’s present tax rate is 2.60 mils on every \$100,000 of assessed value.

Sterling Elementary is the only public school in Sterling. It provides kindergarten through sixth grade and has a present enrollment of about 210 pupils. A Head-Start program is also offered for low-income students of preschool age. This program has an enrollment of about 40 students.

There are a number of State parks and campgrounds in the Sterling area, including Morgan's Landing, Scout Lake, Bing's Landing, Longmere Lake, and a number of campgrounds in the Swanson River and Lakes area.

Health care is provided by a large number of medical doctors, with support from the Central Peninsula General Hospital, in Soldotna.

There are at least seven churches in the Sterling area.

Economy

Exploration for oil took place in the Swanson River area in the late 1950s when the first commercial amount of oil was discovered. This discovery of oil brought in a large number of oil field workers and Sterling became a boom area for a few years. A small community of homes was built in the vicinity of the Swanson River oil field and about 20 families moved in. Their children went to Sterling Elementary and high school children went to Kenai Central High School.

In the late 1980s there was a fish processing plant in Sterling that employed over 50 people at its peak season. However, the soil became contaminated in the area and the plant is no longer in operation. The plant is now empty and sits idle.

The oil industry is a declining industry and most of the houses that were built in the oil field area are now abandoned. The community's economy is now based on the sport fishing industry, the summer influx of recreational enthusiasts, some oil and gas processing, timber, government and retail employment. Sterling workers travel to the North Slope to work, as well as to Kenai, Soldotna and other areas.

Sterling businesses consist of motels, hotels, a hostel, bed and breakfast homes, trailer and RV parks, restaurants, carving and craft stores, a grocery store, liquor stores, furniture store, beauty salons, a gas station, tackle shop, gift shops and general merchandise shop, fishing charters and lodges, laundromats, rental companies, and other small businesses. The last federal census showed that the median family income increased from \$47,700 in 1990 to \$53,889 in 2000.

Transportation

The Sterling Highway provides access to Homer to the South and Anchorage and beyond to the North. There are at least nine private airstrips in the Sterling area and a private seaplane base at Scout and Longmere Lakes. There are a number of privately operated boat launches to the Kenai River and Scout and Longmere Lakes. Nearby Kenai and Soldotna offer public airports. Public docking facilities are also offered on the Kenai River.

Some of the transportation improvements the community supported in the survey taken in 2000 were:

- ❖ Four lanes to Soldotna
- ❖ Kenai River bridge crossing to Funny River
- ❖ Cooper Landing Sterling Highway Bypass
- ❖ Improve existing roads
- ❖ Bike trails
- ❖ Redo intersection at Sterling Post Office / Sterling Highway

III. COMMUNITY VALUES

Community meetings that were held to develop a “VISION” for Sterling revealed the following facts:

The Citizens of Sterling LIKE

- ❖ Rural atmosphere
- ❖ River system recreation
- ❖ Small town feeling (no regulations)
- ❖ Independence
- ❖ Senior Center
- ❖ Snow machining opportunities
- ❖ Development without government intrusion
- ❖ Community Club

The Citizens of Sterling DISLIKE

- ❖ No official voice
- ❖ Lack of participation in meetings/functions due to no communication
- ❖ Lack of multi-use community center
- ❖ No passing lanes on the Sterling highway
- ❖ No control of property values
- ❖ No public cemetery

IV. STERLING “VISION STATEMENT”

Utilizing the above information, the Sterling residents developed the following “VISION STATEMENT:”

“We the citizens of Sterling, who value the preservation of family life for future generations, wish to live in a rural atmosphere that offers recreational opportunities. We will strive to preserve our natural environment by creating responsible access and promoting sustainable economic growth.

We strive for a community that has minimal government control of its development and future and brings excellence to its environment and schools, and is a safe place to live and raise a family.”

V. STERLING COMMUNITY GOALS, OBJECTIVES AND POLICIES

Based on public input from community planning meetings, survey results, and other comments, the following goals and objectives have been identified by the residents of Sterling:

GOAL A: ORGANIZE SO AS TO HAVE AN OFFICIAL VOICE TO THE BOROUGH

- ❖ Support a coalition group of seniors, business community, community club, schools, churches, organizations, etc., that will be capable of developing community consensus
- ❖ Approach the Kenai Peninsula Borough with a resolution to acknowledge this coalition group as the official voice of the Sterling community
- ❖ Research to establish Sterling boundaries

GOAL B: PROMOTE COMMUNITY SAFETY AND PRIDE

- ❖ Lobby the State of Alaska to redesign the hazardous post office intersection
- ❖ Put up a “Welcome to Sterling” sign
- ❖ Maintain streetlights in working condition and sidewalks cleaned
- ❖ Support development of programs, such as the “Neighborhood Watch Program”
- ❖ Support year-round use of recreational trail system

GOAL C: PROMOTE A HEALTHY ENVIRONMENT

- ❖ Support and encourage a plan for cleanup of contaminated soil in Sterling
- ❖ Support a healthy environment along the river system
- ❖ Work with the Borough for a better process to identify road maintenance

GOAL D: DEVELOP COMMUNITY ORGANIZATIONS, MULTI-USE FACILITY AND COMMUNITY PROPERTY IMPROVEMENTS; WORK IN CONJUNCTION WITH LEGISLATURE AND VARIOUS FUNDING SOURCES TO BRING PROJECTS TO FRUITION

- ❖ Support the Sterling Senior Center's project acquisition
- ❖ Continue development of community property
- ❖ Work with the Borough and State to acquire and develop property on Scout Lake for a Sterling community park
- ❖ Develop a plan for a multi-use facility
- ❖ Establish a chamber of commerce and/or visitor center

GOAL E: PROMOTE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND RESPONSIBLE DEVELOPMENT OF PRIVATE LAND

- ❖ Identify projects that promote economic development
- ❖ Support coalition's effort to increase jobs in the Sterling area
- ❖ Support a feasibility study for a swimming pool and a therapeutic pool and spa
- ❖ Explore local option zoning; identify issues on local zoning

GOAL F: IMPROVE TRANSPORTATION AND INFRASTRUCTURE

- ❖ Install and maintain public restroom facilities at community property
- ❖ Support building a bridge crossing the Kenai River to Funny River
- ❖ Support a highway bypass around Cooper Landing
- ❖ Partner with the State to keep local parks open during the winter months for local use
- ❖ Lobby the State to widen the Sterling Highway between Soldotna and Sterling to a four-lane highway

VI. FUTURE COMMUNITY/ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT STRATEGIES

The Sterling Community Action Team will utilize this long-term Sterling Community Action Plan to seek and secure future sources of local, state, federal and private foundation technical and financial assistance to promote community cohesiveness and development of our community.

The strategy for this plan to be implemented is for the coalition group to meet on a regular basis to review potential action items and develop, where appropriate, funding applications to meet the goals and objectives as stated. Continued assistance to the coalition group in the implementation of specific items outlined in this plan will be provided by the Kenai Peninsula Economic Development District, Kenai Peninsula Resource Conservation and Development District, and the Kenai Peninsula Borough.

VII. STERLING COMMUNITY ACTION PLAN APPROVALS

The Sterling Community Action Team hereby adopts this Sterling Community Action Plan and agrees to effectively use all available assistance to realize the goals, objectives, and action items outlined herein.

/s/ Grace Merkes
Grace Merkes, Vista Volunteer

05/19/04
Date

/s/ Robert Oakes
Robert Oakes

05/15/04
Date

/s/ Barbara Blakeley
Barbara Blakeley

05/20/04
Date

/s/ Norm Blakeley
Norm Blakeley

05/21/04
Date

/s/ Michael J. Lund
Mike Lund

05/25/04
Date

/s/ Terry Allen Buffo, Sr.
Terry Buffo

05/19/04
Date

/s/ Dillion R. Kimple
Dillion Kimple

05/19/04
Date

/s/ Jean Kimple
Jean Kimple

05/19/04
Date

/s/ Judy Warren
Judy Warren, Sterling Senior Center

05/29/04
Date

VIII.	APPENDIX A:	2000 Census Date
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**COMMUNITY
BOROUGH
CENSUS
AREA
POPULATION
2000**

Sterling
Kenai Peninsula Borough
Kenai Peninsula
4705

IX. APPENDIX B: Map of the Sterling Area



X. Appendix C: Map of Kenai Peninsula Borough

